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**Tropical Ecology and Society
Reconciling Conservation and
Sustainable Use of Biodiversity**

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ABSTRACTS**

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O13-07 – S13 Biodiversity conservation in a conflicting context – The case of the Congo basin

Monday 20 June 20 / 11:00-15:30 – Barthez

A legal approach to biodiversity conservation and forest rights of indigenous peoples in the Congo Basin: towards new legal tools

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The livelihood of almost all indigenous peoples of the Congo basin depends on their free access to the forest natural resources. At present, some technical and legal means exist to improve the forest rights of indigenous peoples but the main question is what indigenous peoples themselves would request to truly fit their needs while conserving biodiversity. Based on the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, this paper will explore the possible legal solutions such as protected areas and their various forms of governance and discuss the most/less suitable options and their conditions. Indeed, Indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas (ICCAs) have been highly debated over the past few years, along with participatory management. If those models could support both IP livelihoods and biodiversity conservation in some protected areas, their implementation could be the first step towards the creation of a new form of "protected area" created and managed by indigenous peoples. This paper will therefore discuss this option further and put it in the broader context of the Congo basin.

O13-08 – S13 Biodiversity conservation in a conflicting context – The case of the Congo basin

Monday 20 June 20 / 11:00-15:30 – Barthez

The OFAC: Interface between science and policy decisions on forest conservation and protected areas

MARTIN TADOUM

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The conservation of biodiversity and sustainable forest management are facing many challenges in the Central Africa region. Indeed the growing demand of agricultural products and the increase of ore exploration and exploitation in many countries have put a pressure on land use. We are then assisting to the conflict of forested area and other land use sector.

The OFAC (Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale) has been set up under the authority of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) for favoring scientifically based policy decisions. So, OFAC is a unique regional observatory dedicated to the forest resources of the central African region. Since its inception in 2007, OFAC is still implemented by the JRC in co-operation with a consortium of scientific institutions thanks to the European Union funding.

OFAC collects, verifies, harmonizes and disseminates information about forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin in order to improve governance and sustainable management of forest ecosystems by the decision makers and other stakeholders.

The approach adopted which relies on human resources in the region, makes the development of OFAC a true exercise in capacity building at both the national and regional level. The principal data providers are COMIFAC and its regional partners (e.g. RAPAC), the ministries responsible for forest management and the environment, etc.

The main outputs of the observatory are a detailed web-based information system (<http://observatoire-comifac.net/index.php>) and the production of the State of central African forests.

Referring to the missions and the products delivered by OFAC, it is unanimously accepted that the observatory is an excellent tool for Central Africa region. But, the observatory is facing some difficulties like the misunderstanding of its legal status by the national focal points. Due to that wrong understanding, there is an insufficient ownership of the observatory by the focal points, the OFAC national groups and other key national stakeholders. Moreover, there is less recognition of OFAC by other actors.

Based on the new challenges in the forest sector, the role of the observatory will increase in the future. As recommended by the recent business plan study conducted by COMIFAC Executive Secretariat, the COMIFAC ministers have to give a legal status to OFAC by adopting the legal and institutional framework which will enable the observatory to fully play its role as a scientific platform for decision-makers.